

Treads and Trends-A Look at FY06

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During Fiscal Year 2006, the Army lost 75 Soldiers in privately owned vehicle accidents which, by our definition, involved sedans, trucks, vans, mopeds and all-terrain vehicles. In addition to those losses, another 48 Soldiers died in motorcycle accidents.

The most common reasons we lose Soldiers in POV accidents remain speeding and lack of seatbelt use. During FY06, speeding accounted for 35 percent of our POV fatalities, while Soldiers not wearing their seatbelts contributed another 28 percent. If there is a good news story in all of this, our alcohol-related POV fatalities were down. Only six of our POV fatal accidents involved an intoxicated driver. Our most at-risk population for POV accidents remains our young Soldiers in grades private through specialist or corporal, and the most dangerous time is between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. Of the 75 Soldiers who died, 46 were age 18 to 24, and 49 were in the lowest four enlisted grades. Of the fatal accidents, 35 occurred between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m.

While POV fatality trends remain largely stable, the same cannot be said of motorcycles. Instead of our youngest riders being our greatest concern, we're seeing a rise in the average age of Soldiers dying in motorcycle accidents. That average age has now risen to 30, moving closer to the national average of 38 years old. The most alarming factor was the number of NCOs and officers involved in these fatal accidents. Sergeants and above accounted for 32 of the 48 fatalities—a disturbing 68 percent. Also, the peak POV fatality hours—11 p.m. to 5 a.m.—were reversed with motorcycles. Of the 48 fatal motorcycle accidents, 37 happened between 5 a.m. and 11 p.m., a trend suggesting Soldiers are increasingly using motorcycles to commute to work and around town. A big concern was the 16 Soldiers who died because they disregarded Department of Defense Instruction 6055.4 and Army Regulation 385-55 and rode without the necessary personal protective equipment. Soldiers who ride motorcycles are required to wear the following PPE:

- **Helmets** — Certified to meet Department of Transportation standards and properly fastened beneath the chin. If stationed outside the continental United States in a host nation that does not have a DOT-equivalent helmet standard, the helmet will meet DOT standards.

- **Goggles and face shields** — Must be either impact- or shatter-resistant goggles or a full-face shield properly attached to the helmet. A windshield or eyeglasses do not provide proper eye protection.

- **Sturdy footwear is mandatory** — Leather boots or over-the-ankle shoes are strongly encouraged.

- **Clothing** — Long-sleeved shirt or jacket, long trousers and full-fingered gloves or mittens designed for use on a motorcycle.

- **Garment visibility** — A brightly colored outer upper garment during the day and a reflective upper garment during the night. The outer upper garment shall be clearly visible and not covered.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration noted in their June 2006 technical report (DOT HS 810 606), Recent Trends in Fatal Motorcycle Crashes: An update, that about 66 percent of the fatally injured motorcycle riders in states without universal helmet laws in 2004 were not wearing helmets, compared to 15 percent in states with universal

helmet laws. In addition, according to NHTSA's Traffic Safety Facts (DOT HS 610 820), a rider is 37 percent more likely to survive an accident when wearing a helmet. Here again, the Army is mirroring the national average with one-third of Soldiers killed in motorcycle accidents not wearing a helmet. Again, the only good news story with motorcycle fatalities was the decline in alcohol use; only six accidents could be attributed to intoxication.

Standards, discipline and leader involvement are the key to reducing our POV accidents. Leaders getting to know their Soldiers and what they're doing both on and off duty will reduce our fatality rates.

As a Soldier, it's important to tie your actions to the Soldier's Creed (Warrior Ethos).

"I will always place the mission first." Ask yourself if you are placing the mission first if you disregard Army regulations.

"I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself." Ask yourself if failing to wear your PPE isn't also failing to maintain yourself.

"I am an expert and I am a professional." Ask yourself if deliberately doing stupid things and ignoring established standards reflects someone who is an expert and a professional.

Although we will never prevent all accidents, engaged leaders encouraging Soldiers to think and act safely is the key to success.